Peter’s Miraculous Escape from Prison



Scripture Reference: Acts 12:1-24

Suggested Theme: God hears our prayers. We can be a church that prays together for those in need.

Memory Verse: “Pray in the Spirit at all times. Pray with all kinds of prayers, and ask for everything you need. To do this you must always be ready. Never give up. Always pray for all God’s people.” Ephesians 6:18, ICB

Story Overview:

King Herod (King of the Jewish people) persecuted Christians and ordered the arrest of the Apostle Peter. The whole church was very afraid, so they gathered together in a house to pray. God answered this prayer and sent an angel to release Peter and lead him to the house. Peter went into hiding during this tumultuous time. God displayed His power once again by sending an angel to strike Herod with a terrible fatal illness.

Background Study:

Click here for an overview of the Book of Acts

The situation in Jerusalem had become volatile. For the first time, we read of an Apostle of Jesus being put to death because of his faith. This was James, John’s brother. Years earlier, Jesus called James and John to follow him while fishing with their father (Matthew 4:21-22).

Jewish kings of this time were concerned with pleasing Roman leaders, and the Jews often mistrusted them. When Herod saw the Jews approve of the killing of James, he knew a public trial of Peter could make him very popular with them. He had Peter arrested and thrown in prison during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Passover). The trial would take place after Passover was over.

The Jewish Christians in Jerusalem would have already gathered for Passover, so the news of Peter’s arrest must have gotten around quickly. Although Christians pray as individuals, Christians have gathered together to pray from the very beginning of the church (Acts 2:42). In this case, many people gathered at the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark and a relative of Barnabas (see the Background Information on the story of the Antioch Church).

Peter was heavily guarded. Escape would have been impossible since he was sleeping between two guards and bound with two chains. Sentries were even guarding the door. But God is certainly the God of the impossible! When the angel appeared, he patiently guided Peter in getting dressed. Then the angel led Peter past the guards, through the city gates (which opened on their own) and down a street before disappearing as quickly as he had appeared.

At first, Peter thought he was in a vision, but when the angel disappeared, he knew these events were really happening. Upon realising this, his first thought was to go to Mary’s house. This must have been a common

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place for Christians to meet.

The instant recognition that the servant girl, Rhoda, had of Peter and her immediate excitement and joy when she opened the door reveal how all social levels of society met together as Christians. This house was full of people praying for Peter's release, so it is almost humorous that they didn't believe Rhoda when she announced that he had been freed. It is like us in our prayer life.

One suggestion to Rhoda was that she had seen Peter's angel (Acts 12:15) instead of Peter. Personal "guardian angels" are mentioned a few times in Scripture, but there is never a full explanation or detail of how they function. Many depictions of angels today are simply assumptions and guesses instead of being based on Scripture. See Matthew 18:10 and Hebrews 1:14.

Peter asked the people gathered to let the other church leaders (including James, the brother of Jesus) know what had happened, and then he seemed to have gone into hiding for a little while. When Herod could not find Peter, he had the prison guards executed.

King Herod could not produce Peter for public trial, so he escaped embarrassment and travelled to Caesarea, where he had several meetings to resolve disputes against him. At one point, he dressed in royal robes and addressed the people. This particular audience needed to make peace with Herod so their food trade would not be cut off. They began to shout praises to him. They called him a god instead of a man. After the humiliation in Jerusalem, being called a god must have sounded wonderful to him.

Sometimes, the sin is in what we do; sometimes, it is in what we choose not to do. Herod listened to the praise and chose not to give the praise to God. Judgement was immediate. An angel of the Lord struck him down. He was eaten by worms and died. (Acts 12:23).

Herod's attempt to stop the word of God failed.

Which King Herod?

The name "King Herod" appears a few times in the New Testament, and knowing which one is being discussed can be confusing. Here are descriptions of three of them:

1. **Herod the Great (37-4BC)**: This Herod was king at the time of Jesus's birth. The wise men visited him. In an attempt to kill baby Jesus, he ordered Jewish boys under the age of two to be killed. Matthew 2:1-15
2. **Herod Antipas (4BC-39AD)**: This is the Herod that had John the Baptist put to death (Matthew 14:1-12). Pilate sent Jesus to him before his crucifixion (Luke 23:7-12).
3. **Herod Agrippa I (37-44AD)**: The Herod of today's story and grandson of Herod the Great.

Way to Introduce the Story:

As you begin the session, write the letters J-O-Y in large letters where the children can see them. Explain to the children that these letters are one easy way to remember how to pray. We should pray about Jesus (and the good things He has done) first because He is the most important. Then, we can pray about others next so that God can help them. Lastly, we can pray about ourselves and our needs.

Sing this song to the tune of Jingle Bells:

- J-O-Y, J-O-Y, this must surely be.
- Jesus first, yourself last, and others in between.

"Today, we will learn about when an entire church prayed for Peter. Some amazing things happened when the church prayed together."

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The Story:

King Herod was the king of the Jews. He persecuted Christians and tried to hurt them. He ordered that the Apostle James be put to death by a sword. The whole Jerusalem church must have been very sad as well as afraid that one of the Apostles had been killed by King Herod.

But the Jews who did not believe in Jesus were happy and thought King Herod had done the right thing. King Herod wanted to be popular with the Jews, so he arrested the Apostle Peter. He planned a public trial to accuse Peter and stop his teaching about King Jesus.

Peter had chains put around his wrists and feet, and he was chained between two guards. There were also guards guarding the prison doors.

When Peter was arrested, the Christians in Jerusalem gathered to pray to God. Many of them gathered at the home of a woman named Mary and prayed that Peter would be released from prison.

The night before Peter's trial, he was sleeping in the prison, chained between the two guards, when someone woke him up. It was an angel. The angel told Peter to get up and get dressed. The chains immediately fell off Peter. Peter followed the angel past the guards and out of the prison. When they came to the locked city gates, they opened independently.

Peter followed the angel out of the city and to the end of a street. All of this time, Peter thought he must be having a vision. Then, as quickly as he appeared, the angel vanished.

When Peter looked around, he realised that this was no vision. He was actually outside the city! God had sent an angel to save him.

Peter quickly went to the home of one of the Christians, a woman named Mary. He knew that other Christians liked to meet there.

A servant girl named Rhoda answered the door, and she couldn't believe what she saw. She was happy, surprised and so shocked that she left Peter standing there and didn't even let him in.

When Rhoda told the others that Peter was at the door, they didn't believe her. They thought she was seeing things that weren't there.

But when they went and checked, they realised Rhoda was right. God had answered their prayers! Peter was out of prison. Peter told them to tell the other believers what had happened, and then he went to another place so Herod could not find him.

Herod was extremely angry. When he could not find Peter, he had all the guards executed.

King Herod was so angry that he travelled to another city to settle some business. The people in the other city feared Herod would be angry at them and stop letting them buy food. So they began to praise Herod and say he was God.

Herod should have stopped the people and corrected them. But instead of telling him he was not God, he just let them keep saying it. Then something shocking happened. An angel struck Herod down, and he was "eaten by worms" and died.

Herod thought he could kill leaders of the church and stop God. He thought he was as good as God. But he was not. The church only continued to grow more after this. Here's the last verse in the Bible story:

"God's message continued to spread and reach more and more people." Acts 12:24, ICB

While these events were happening in Jerusalem, the outlying Antioch Church strengthened. Barnabas and Saul brought financial help from the Gentile church in Antioch to help their fellow Christians in Jerusalem.

Although Peter and others continue to live in Jerusalem, the Book of Acts' attention shifts to Antioch and the missionary work that springs from there. The Antioch church was thriving and active and would eventually

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become the launching point for each of Saul's (Paul's) missionary journeys.

Whether we pray by ourselves or with other Christians, God listens to our prayers. We can pray about anything, anywhere, and know that God hears and cares about our prayers.

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using various methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible, but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Click here for visual aids and more storytelling methods.

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Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story. Reflection questions encourage them to internalise the meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child's spiritual development and help them connect to God. Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.

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Review:

- When Peter was in prison, what was the church doing? (Praying)
- Whose house did the church gather at to pray? (A Christian named Mary)
- When Peter was sleeping in his prison cell, who tapped him on the shoulder and released him from prison? (An angel)
- How did the angel get Peter out of the prison past all of the guards? (It was a miracle- the angel walked with Peter, and they just walked past all of the groups of guards. The iron gate to the city opened by itself, and they walked through it. After that, the angel "suddenly left him.")
- Who answered the door when Peter came to the house where the church was praying? (A servant girl named Rhoda)
- Who did the church think was at the door? (An angel- but it was Peter)
- What did Peter do after the believers realised he was at the door? (He told them to tell the other believers he was free from prison, and then he went to another place)
- What does this story show you about God?
- What does this story show you about people?
- What did the church learn from this experience?

Reflection:

- What do you think the prison looked like, or how Peter felt to be chained and watched by many guards?

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- Imagine you are Peter, and an angel leads you out of prison. You think you're seeing a vision, but then you realise it's real! How do you feel when you realize you've escaped the prison?
- How do you think the people praying felt when they realised their prayer for Peter to be freed from jail had been answered?
- How do you think Rhoda felt when she saw Peter at the door and was the first to know he had escaped?
- Has your family prayed together? When do you pray together?
- When do you pray? Do you like praying?
- Is there a special prayer you say often? What kind of things do you talk to God about?
- When has your church prayed together? Have you ever been part of a special time to pray with your church?
- Who does your church pray for? Has your church prayed for people in need?
- Who do you want your church to pray for who is in need?
- Why is praying with other people special? Why is it good to pray with others and not always on your own?
- What part of this story surprised you most?
- What question do you have for God about this story?

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a lifelong friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. A variety of prayer methods are found here.

Song Suggestions:

- ABC: Jesus Died for You and Me Song
- J-E-S-U-S Song
- God is Listening When We Pray (Song) English/Cebuano
- Read Your Bible. Pray Every Day.
- Refer to the Song Page on this website for more song options.

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Activities and Crafts:

- How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.
- Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.

Activities:

- Look over today's church bulletin with the children to see if there are any prayer requests that they can pray for.
- Invite someone with a mature prayer life to talk to the children about what they do.

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- Begin a group prayer project for the term.
  - One idea might be to draw a tree (or bring in an actual limb) and have the children write their prayer requests on green “leaves” each week and attach them to the tree. If you attach them with blue-tac, they can be taken off and passed out so that children can pray for that item in a chain prayer.
  - Another idea is a “prayer line”, where prayer requests are written on paper and attached to the wall, one after the other, to form a line. This can get longer each week. Children can add comments on answered prayers.

Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable “God’s Story” printable reflection page. Free printables for this story.

Crafts:

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Print and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. Free printables for this story.

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Other Online Resources:

- Colouring page and puzzle worksheets (Calvary Curriculum)
- Craft: Jelly bean prayer craft (dltk-holidays.com)
- Craft: Prayer pail with popsicle/craft sticks (lubirdbaby.com)
- Game, Five-finger prayer activity (sermons4kids.com)
- Worksheet, Fill-in-the-blank (sundayschoolsources.com)
- Recipe for praying pretzels (dltk-bible.com)
- Teacher’s Guide (ccquakertown.org)
- Devotionals from ccquakertown.org

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